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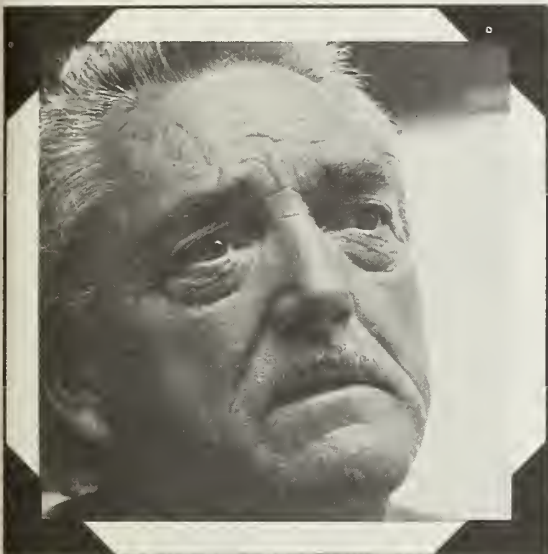
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Joe Stone



Dorothy



Caroline

People Talk About Using Food Stamps

A lot of changes have been taking place in the Food Stamp Program this year. Six people—one former participant and five current participants—talk about some of these changes. **Page 2**

Food Programs: Do They Work?

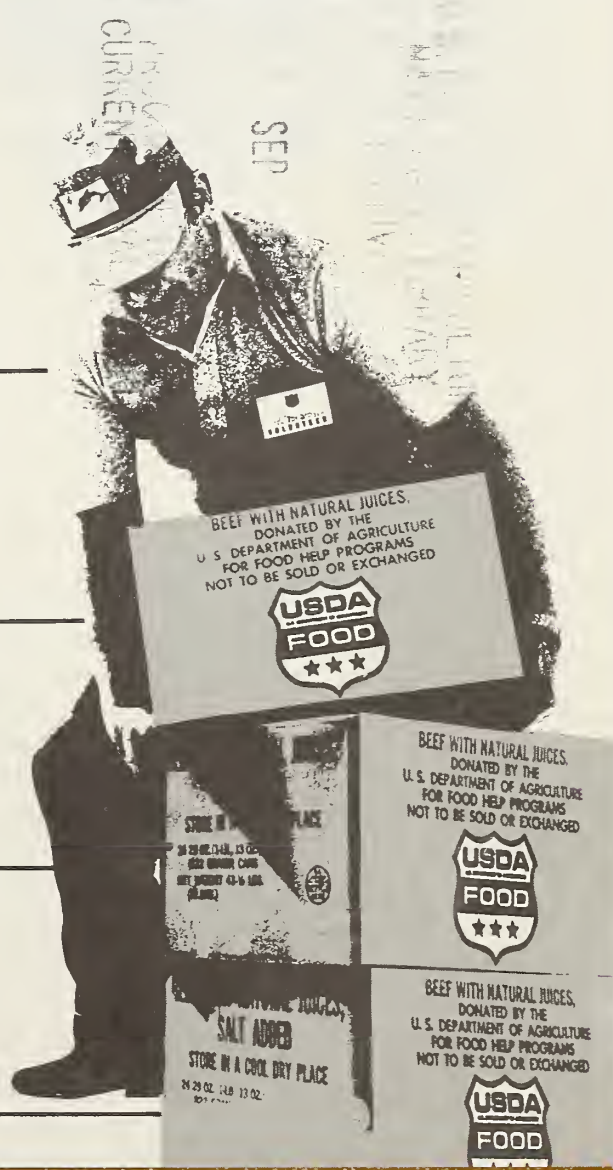
How far have we come in eliminating hunger and malnutrition in this country? A long way, say physicians from the Field Foundation. But there's still room for progress. **Page 10**

Need to Know More About Buying Food?

Getting the most nutrition for each food dollar can be a challenge—especially for low income families. Here are some suggestions on how to save and where to go for advice. **Page 13**

When Disaster Strikes...

When disaster strikes, people need help fast. Would you know what to do to get emergency food aid to those who need it? **Page 17**



People Talk About Using Food Stamps

Ever wonder what it's like to use food stamps? To pull out stamps instead of cash at the cash register? To have your life change because laws change in Washington?

Because of the Food Stamp Act of 1977, a lot of changes have been taking place in the Food Stamp Program. In a series of studies, the Department of Agriculture will be examining the impact of these changes and the effectiveness of the Food Stamp Program.

At times, however, the "whole story" of "program effectiveness and impact" eludes the pages of reports. The people who use food stamps have a lot to say about the program, and they're worth listening to.

In the following interviews, six people—a former food stamp participant and five current participants—talk about food stamps. They tell how they're dealing with changes in the program—like the elimination of the purchase requirement and how it's changed the way they budget and buy. While their reactions to the changes vary, they have in common deep feelings about living on food stamps.



Dorothy

Dorothy

Dorothy used food stamps off and on for 6 years. At the time of the interview, she was supporting her six children through the CETA job program and was no longer getting food stamps.

She first applied for the program when her husband left several years ago. Having had no previous training, she found it hard to find a job.

"It was a difficult time," she said, "but we all stayed together. We figured that was the only way we were going to make it.

"Food stamps were good for me," she continued. "I'd get them once a month, and I'd know I had that much food money coming to me that month, and I just had to budget accordingly.

"The family helped out a lot. The children wouldn't go into the refrigerator on their own. When they wanted something, they would ask. And although that's a good thing, that's bad, too. It's not a normal way to live, really. But being on assistance makes things different anyway.

"You *have* to live different than other people," she said, pausing. "You *feel* different. You feel different going into the store and pulling out food stamps rather than money. It's a terrible way to live. It really is."

Even though she no longer participates in the Food Stamp Program, Dorothy continues to be active in a food stamp client relations group sponsored by the local department of social services. Her work as chairman of the group has given her a lot of insight into the problems of food stamp users.

People keep hoping, she said, that

somehow, somewhere, money is going to turn up, and they won't have to ask for assistance. "You just keep thinking something's going to happen to relieve the situation. By the time people show up at the food stamp office, it's often a last ditch measure and the pressure's on.

"It's frightening. It's so frightening. You almost forget what you're doing, and you almost can't fill that form out."

The new application forms, she said, are an improvement, however. They are "easier to read. They're printed up better. They're written better. Easier to understand."

A crisis facing Dorothy at the time of the interview was whether or not she would be able to keep the CETA job that had kept her off assistance and food stamps for the past year.

"Employment is bad right now," she said, "and I'm still in the job market where just about everybody has more skills than me.

"But I have a better feeling now after having worked in the CETA program for a year. I've learned some things, and I've gotten more respect for myself—my children have and my family has, too.

"If I have to go back on assistance," said Dorothy, "I will be eligible for food stamps. And that's one thing that frightens me. I am *not* going back on assistance and that's all there is to it. No, I'm not, no matter what—not assistance or food stamps, no indeed."

And what if the CETA job doesn't come through and she can't find another one right away? Will the stigma she feels in using food stamps be too high a price to pay?

Dorothy smiled and shook her head slightly. "Not for going hungry. You have to swallow your pride. I've had to do it enough. But I don't like it. I never will get used to it. I don't know whether people ever really do. They may say they do but . . . you don't really get used to having to ask, and ask, and ask."

[[There's a tendency in government to use big words and small print. And I'm trying to get that turned around. Small words and big print—so that people can understand what they see.

"People are scared to death of going into a government office. They can't understand the forms. They don't know what the forms mean. They're absolutely terrified—won't go. And we understand that. So we're changing the program to accommodate the needs of these people—people who've been literally left behind. I mean they've been lost. And they're coming. They're coming in the program now.]]

*Secretary of Agriculture,
Bob Bergland*

Veroncia

Like Dorothy, Veroncia has strong feelings about using food stamps.

"Let's face it, you're different," she said. "You've become, well . . . like a goldfish in a bowl.

"You may know that you're working—like in my case—and that you're doing an honest job and you're not receiving stamps for any of the reasons that the magazines love to write about . . .

"You may know you've *not* all of your life been trying to beat the system and that [you] do deserve food stamps. You have a right to them.

"You may know all of these things. However, when you're standing there in the cold daylight and somebody's looking at your groceries and thinking, 'There's one of those people,' you feel real bad about having to use food stamps."

Cashiers are sometimes the biggest problem for clients, said Veroncia.

"One cashier didn't see why . . . I should be *allowed* to buy meat!"

Veroncia's husband was disabled several years ago. For a while the family lived off workers' compensation. That ran out. Then their cash ran out. The rent was due and the children had to eat, says Veroncia, so they went on assistance.

Veroncia has mixed feelings about changes taking place under the new Food Stamp Program. Her allotment has been reduced, and she thinks some people might have trouble budgeting their money now that they aren't required to spend some of it on

food stamps. "I know I'm capable of taking that money and buying food because I know I have to," she said.

But, she added, there may be times when it's hard, especially when there are other pressing expenses. When your choice is having your gas cut off or using your food money to pay a bill, she said, you've got a tough decision.

"During the snow, if I had to opt which one I'd do, I'd take the gas. Later on, my food box may be empty and if I've spent the money and got gas—I've got heat but I don't have any food."

At the same time, Veroncia sees a tremendous advantage to the new "no pay" system. It's quicker.

"You can go in . . . and you don't have to wait. And if you are in a long line, the line moves fast. It may seem strange that swiftness should be one of the things that make [the new system] likeable to some people, but you have to take into consideration that some people have to get a ride.

"And, some have to get a ride with an impatient driver. I mean, that doesn't seem important, maybe, to everyday folks, but if you're living in a world of welfare or social services, then that's important."

Caroline

Caroline is a working mother with two children. She and her son "Little" were down at the social services office early on the day of the interview. They'd just been burned out of their apartment.

They lost about everything in the fire. "But we'll be okay," she said. "We'll just find a new place and get some rugs and throw some pillows on the floor for sitting."

Caroline finds the new "no pay" system suits her just fine.

"I like it . . . if my check didn't come at the right time [under the old sys-

tem] I'd have to find a way to get the money together to get my food stamps . . . This way, I don't have to worry about it.

"Also, I like this way because . . . you have to have things to cook with—like aluminum foil—and stuff to bag the food in. [Now] you can buy that without all that money being tied up in food stamps.

"I like it, I really like it . . . A lot of people squawk about it, but I don't understand. Why not just put together the money you used to put out to buy the food stamps? Just say well, okay, this is money for my food stamps that I would normally pay for. So, you know, use that."

Caroline "works at budgeting."

"I believe in buying in quantity," she said. "If I go to the store to get some sugar and I know how much money I have to work with, I buy 5 pounds. Then the next time I don't have to buy any sugar. Without much money, that's what you have to do.

"And, I'll go to the store and I'll get a big pack of family chicken—and this is where my aluminum foil comes in—and I'll break it down . . . I know I've got to feed three, and one piece for each usually does us. Then, the next month I don't have to stock up on chicken because I've done that . . . I do just like I would if I had money."

A big priority for Caroline right now is developing job skills so she can get a better job and support her family on her own.

"I want to have a trade," she said. "Something so I can go anywhere in the United States and still take my trade with me. Because, eventually, I'm going to make it. I won't have to come down here anymore.

"I want to have a home, a good job. I just want to live real nice and be self-supporting and travel. That's what I want to do.

"I don't even want to know what this place looks like. I don't even want to come in here again. It gives you kind of a bad feeling. It does. To me, I just look at it and say 'I don't like it.' But, I say, I know what I have to do."



Veronica

*Caroline and
her two sons*



Joe Stone

"Let's put it this way. It's no shame to be poor," said Joseph Stone in a slow gravelly voice. "It's no disgrace. It's very inconvenient. But, after all, the poor's got to live the same as the rich."

Joseph Stone's been around a lot and seen a lot. He saw action in the South Pacific during World War II as a gunner with the Air Force. He's worked in mining camps. He's worked in lumbering. For a time, he lived out West. That's where he met his wife. They raised their children together and they did pretty well.

Then Stone got sick. For a long time he's been plagued with a bad heart and high blood pressure, and he's had cancer. It's slowed him down, he says, and sometimes it

really gets to him. "But the Lord gave me my life and I suppose I have to do the best I can with it."

He gets money now from the Veteran's Administration, and he's also qualified for public assistance—but he won't take it. It's just too much trouble, he said, shaking his head. He's adamant. "I just won't go through that again."

But the day of the interview he was applying for food stamps. He's used them before and he likes them.

"Food stamps are like everything else," he said. "In my opinion you take food stamps like a dollar. If you use them the right way, you can manage. But you can't afford to take food stamps and go out there and buy a steak and expect to stretch 'em. You gotta buy sensible."

Stone takes pride in his wife's cooking and her sense of economy. "We buy dry beans, and we buy potatoes and canned food—stuff like that, you know what I mean."

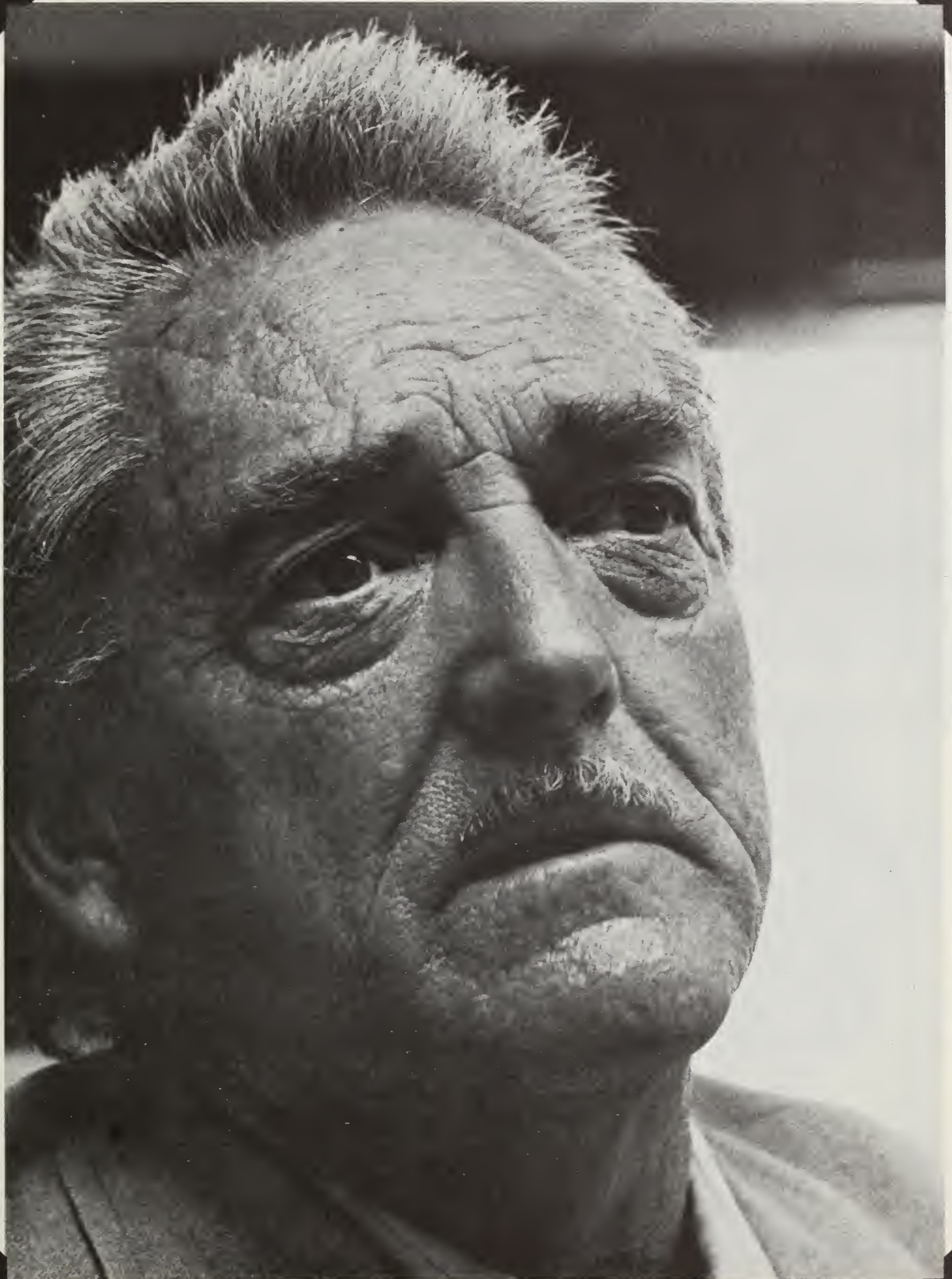
"She won't waste a crumb. I mean she won't waste a crumb. And she takes potatoes, boils 'em, mashes 'em, and dips 'em in corn meal, and you've never tasted anything so delicious in your life."

Stone is glad he doesn't have to buy his stamps anymore. "I know when you had to pay for 'em, it was just like everything else. Sometimes it was hard. 'Cause you still had to put cash money out. By the time I'd pay the rent and buy firewood—I have to use wood and wood has gone up terrible. . . . By not having to pay for food stamps, it gives me a little more money to help out with other things. That should make it a whole lot easier."

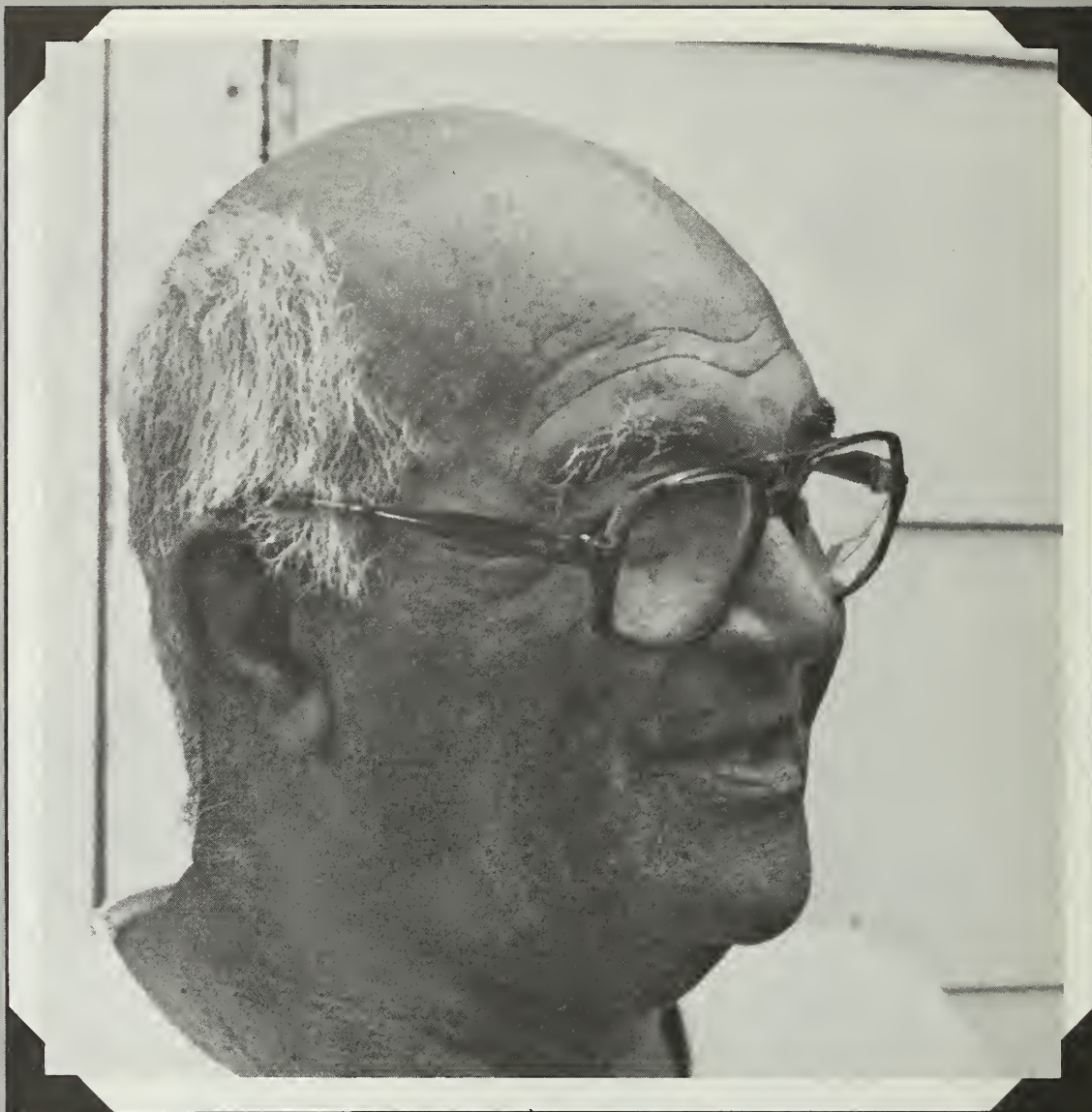
Stone doesn't take much heed of criticisms of the Food Stamp Program. "Everybody's entitled to their own thoughts, I imagine. But when you sit down and think about it—suppose there weren't such things as stamps. It would be more difficult than what it is now. In my opinion," he said with a slow nod, "I think they're a great help."

Joe Stone





Kermit Bradley



Anna Bradley

The Bradbys

"Bijaw, bijaw, tictaw." In case you don't recognize that, it's Chick-ahominy for "good morning, good morning, how are you?"

Give Kermit W. Bradby, 70, half a chance and he peppers the air with sounds from his past. Know how to say butter, he challenges—"doesha-bamuti." How about syrup—"see-waga." Or sweet potatoes—"sweeall."

Ever tried Indian bread cooked in ashes, he asks. He can cook it. He can cook things, he teases with delight, you might dare to look at, but you wouldn't dare to try.

Kermit Bradby is a full-blooded Chicahominy Indian. He and his wife, Anna, are two of the many rural elderly people who have found they can now "afford" to join—or rejoin—the Food Stamp Program.

The Bradbys used to use food stamps, but they had to stop because the purchase price "got too high." Because of conflicting and pressing demands of other bills, Anna Bradby explains, it was difficult to come up with the \$80 needed to buy \$100 worth of coupons. "It put us in a real bind," she said.

When they went off stamps, Kermit ended up taking a job down on the river, working Saturdays and Sundays despite his poor health. In recent years, he has suffered from a heart condition.

It wasn't easy. But then the Bradbys have never had it easy. Being Indian wasn't easy, says Bradby.

Ironically, Bradby didn't begin learning about the details of his Indian heritage and the "old history" until he moved to Philadelphia as a young man—and discovered the Philadelphia library.

"They use to help me find books and things that I wanted to read up on because we didn't get no education hardly," he said. "Seventh grade was all we could get. When we finished seventh grade we were done.

"Going to school is good," he

added, "but you need experience. You need to search and find out about these things—and that's what I did!"

Experience is one thing Kermit Bradby is not short on. He worked in a galvanizing plant in Philadelphia—that's where he met his wife, who sold sandwiches to the men on the weekends. When he was in his thirties, he was almost killed in an accident at the plant when an oil burner exploded. After that, he said, "my nerves were shot."

He moved back to Virginia with his family. Over the years, he's hauled piling, cut wood, worked on an air-base, driven a caterpillar, steered a barge, and fished for herring—pulling up as many as 300,000 fish at a time he says. "I'm, tellin' you, my back should be rubber instead of bone. And, you don't want to go down there dressed up—you come up nothin' but mud!"

After a number of heart attacks, he was forced to ease out of working. And that's when food stamps first became important. Although the Bradbys raise chickens and grow some of their own food, they still didn't have enough to eat right. And food stamps helped. "Until the price got too high," said Anna, "it helped me real good."

The Bradbys got a call from their local food stamp office after the purchase requirement was dropped. The food stamp staffer explained the new system and asked Kermit and his wife if they would like to take advantage of the program again since they were still eligible.

"I think it's great," says Anna Bradby, "because you don't have to put that \$80 out. You can keep it . . . you can use some of your money to buy soap powder and things.

"I think it's a good idea they got it fixed," she adds. "It does help. A whole lot."

by Dianne D. Jenkins

“Elimination of the purchase requirement has resulted in a noticeable increase in participation and almost all of the increase has been in rural areas. There's been virtually no increase in New York or Philadelphia or Puerto Rico or Los Angeles. It's been rural Georgia, it's been rural generally, but more in the south than the north.

“Just exactly why, I guess I couldn't tell you with any precision. But my guess is that these rural people in many cases didn't have the 20 bucks necessary to buy the \$80 worth of food stamps—they just didn't have the 20 bucks. And now that we don't require the \$20, they're able to get the \$60 in food stamp bonuses.”

Bob Bergland,
Secretary of Agriculture

Food Programs: Do They Work?

"Wherever we went and wherever we looked, we saw children in significant numbers who were hungry and sick, children for whom hunger is a daily fact of life, and sickness in many forms, an inevitability. The children we saw were more than just malnourished. They were hungry, weak, apathetic. Their lives are being shortened. They are visibly and predictably losing their health, their energy, their spirits. They are suffering from hunger and disease, and directly or indirectly, they are dying from them—which is exactly what 'starvation' means."

In 1967, a team of physicians from the Field Foundation shocked the Nation with a report of widespread hunger in America. In testimony to Congress in June 1967, the physicians documented what they had seen during visits to poverty-stricken parts of the United States. Their findings dramatized the urgent need to get food help to the poor.

Over the past 10 years, Congress has responded with more than a dozen food aid laws, expanding and changing existing Federal food programs and setting up new ones. Congress now appropriates more than \$9 billion annually for these programs.

But do Federal food programs really work? Are there fewer hungry people now? Looking for answers to these questions, in 1977 the Field Foundation sent out another group of medical teams. The teams included four physicians from the original group, and they returned to many of the same areas the physicians had visited in the late sixties.

This spring their findings were released in a widely publicized report, *Hunger in America: The Federal Re-*

sponse, written by Nick Kotz, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and author of *Let Them Eat Promises: The Politics of Hunger in America*.

Compared to 10 years ago

"Our first and overwhelming impression," the doctors stated in the report, "is that there are fewer grossly malnourished people in this country today than there were 10 years ago . . . where visitors 10 years ago could quickly see large numbers of stunted, apathetic children with swollen stomachs and the dull eyes and poorly healing wounds characteristic of malnutrition—such children are not to be seen in such numbers."

This change, the doctors said, is not a result of a general improvement in living standards or decrease in unemployment. "In fact, the facts of life for Americans living in poverty remain as dark or darker than they were 10 years ago. But in the area of food there is a difference. The Food Stamp Program, the nutritional component of Head Start, school lunch and breakfast programs and to a lesser extent the Women-Infant-Children (WIC) feeding programs have made the difference."

Between May and September 1977, the medical teams traveled nationwide, visiting many of the worst pockets of poverty—from rural Mississippi and Arkansas to the hills of Appalachia and the urban ghettos of the Bronx. Their conclusions, writes Nick Kotz, suggest that "food aid programs may represent one of the unsung yet most effective anti-poverty efforts of the last 15 years."

"We are not dealing with an ineffective tool of public policy but an inadequately used one," Dr. Gordon Harper says in the report. "Congress, the President, and the public should know that the very effectiveness of such programs, where they do work,

makes it a greater national tragedy that many people remain unreached."

Still room for progress

The doctors' accounts "by no means represent an unqualified optimistic endorsement of present food aid programs or of the current nutritional health of the America people," Kotz says, commenting on the teams' findings. "But," he adds, the doctors "fastened onto food aid as one concrete area in which they believe there has been significant progress and opportunity for more."

There are still many unanswered questions, Kotz says. While we know that Federal food programs have addressed the problem of hunger and severe malnutrition, "a more complex question is whether subtler forms of malnutrition . . . among the poor have been lessened significantly."

"Again," said Kotz, "the gross evidence suggests an improvement. However, the nation continues to be plagued with a lack of sophisticated data about its nutritional well-being."

Hunger in America: The Federal Response takes a detailed look at the findings of the Field Foundation study and other recent studies. The following summary includes highlights of those studies, the author's comments, and recommendations of the Field Foundation team.

WIC-dramatic nutrition gains

One of the newest food programs is the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children, commonly known as WIC. Operated by local health facilities, the program provides nutritious food supplements to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, as

well as to infants and children up to their fifth birthday. To participate, mothers and children must be individually certified as "nutrition risks" because of dietary need and inadequate income.

According to Kotz, WIC "represents a unique effort to combine preventive health care, nutrition supplementation and education, and there is evidence all three purposes are being met." Studies of the WIC program by the Center for Disease Control and researchers in individual States, Kotz says, "highlight some dramatic nutritional gains."

- Among WIC participants in Arizona, for example, there was an 81-percent reduction in anemia, an 82-percent reduction in underweight, and a 64-percent improvement in stature.

- In Michigan, 30 percent of the women were anemic before joining the program, 6 percent after.

- In Oregon, 13 percent of the children were anemic before coming on the program, 1 percent after.

- In Pennsylvania, the infant death rate was 10.6 percent before mothers joined the program, zero after.

"Because of limited funding," Kotz says, "the program is now available in only 40 percent of the nation's counties and serves only 1.2 million out of 8 million eligible participants. The Field Foundation doctors recommended not only that the program be expanded, but that eligibility criteria be liberalized so all poor women and infants can be enrolled, not just those with proven malnutrition."

A look at child nutrition

The Federal Government provides cash and donated food assistance to help schools, child care centers, summer recreation facilities and other institutions serve nutritious meals to

“... the facts of life for Americans living in poverty remain as dark or darker than they were 10 years ago. But in the area of food there is a difference. The Food Stamp Program, the nutritional component of Head Start, school lunch and breakfast programs, and to a lesser extent the Women-Infant-Children (WIC) feeding programs have made the difference.”

Field Foundation medical team

children. While *Hunger in America* does not go into great detail about any one of the child nutrition programs, the report does take a brief look at the effectiveness of school breakfast, school lunch and child care food programs.

Recent research, the report notes, documents both the need for schools to offer breakfast and the effectiveness of school breakfast programs in "filling important nutritional needs."

A nationwide study by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that one out of every three schoolchildren leaves home "with less than two-thirds of the needed calories, iron, and vitamins A and C." A Washington State study found that significant numbers of children come to school without breakfast and that these children have "significantly lower intakes of calcium, phosphorus, riboflavin and ascorbic acid."

Findings like these, says Kotz, "are particularly alarming considering well-accepted research studies which show that children without adequate breakfast do not function as well as their schoolmates either emotionally or in cognitive learning abilities."

Both the Congressional Budget Office and Washington State studies showed a marked improvement in the nutritional status of children taking part in the school breakfast program.

"Beyond any question," says Kotz, "the nutritional well-being of poor

children would be improved by substantial expansion of the school breakfast program, but such expansion is vigorously opposed on the ground that providing breakfast is a parental responsibility and because of the reluctance of school boards and administrators to take on another responsibility."

In contrast to the breakfast program, Kotz reports that "the nutritional effectiveness of the present school lunch program has been questioned in recent years."

Quoting a Government Accounting Office study of the lunch program in New York City, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, Kotz notes that the lunches failed to provide the required one-third of recommended dietary allowances for 8 of 13 essential nutrients.

But that doesn't mean, Kotz says, that the lunch program fails to have an impact. The benefits of "an adequate free lunch program for poor children were shown dramatically in a program in Baltimore in which 5,284 children were studied over a 4-year period. After introduction of the free lunch program, the children scored impressive nutritional gains."

Similar gains have been noted for low-income children taking part in the Child Care Food Program. "There was a stark contrast between the bright-eyed, happy and alert little ones we saw in Head Start centers," said Dr. Aaron Shirley of the Field medical team, "and the dull, listless infants and children we saw who did not participate."

How effective are food stamps?

Field Foundation doctors and observers, Kotz reports, "believe that

food stamps are making a crucial difference in improving the quality of the lives of many poor Americans."

And statistics indicate, he says, that the great majority of food stamp users are, indeed, very poor. A study recently released by the Congressional Budget Office showed that 87 percent of food stamp benefits go to households with gross incomes of less than \$6,000.

There's also evidence, he says, that the Food Stamp Program has been effective in increasing the amount of Federal aid going to the Nation's "worst pockets of poverty"—the 256 counties identified in 1968 as "hunger counties" because they had high percentages of poor people, high infant mortality rates, and either weak food programs or none at all.

Quoting a Department of Agriculture study by economist William Boehm, Kotz points that food aid expenditures in these "hunger counties" have increased from \$26 per person in 1969 to \$127 per person today.

But exactly how does this increase in food aid translate into increased food purchases? And what is the precise affect of that aid on nutritional well-being? These questions about the program's effectiveness are harder for researchers to answer specifically.

Few studies, Kotz says, have assessed the actual nutritional impact of food stamps. But recent research should help dispel the myth of the food stamp user who spends his stamps on expensive steaks. Donald West, an agriculture economist at Washington State University, made a comparative study of food buying habits of people who use food stamps and people who do not.

The study showed, says Kotz, that "the family on food stamps allocates its food dollar in the same general categories as the middle class family,

but economizes by buying less expensive foods."

"There is less conclusive evidence," he adds, "... that the poor understand all the fine points of food and nutrition after receiving food stamps." The poor need nutritional guidance, he concludes, as do people of all economic levels: "Nutritional ignorance transcends class or economic lines."

Not without problems

While the Food Stamp Program has made definite gains, it is not without problems, according to Kotz. "... Studies show that program participation has been limited by failure to inform eligible people about benefits, by the restrictive and hostile attitudes of program administrators, by limited access to food stamp issuance offices, by the high cost of purchasing stamps, and the stigma associated with participating in a welfare program The Field Foundation doctors constantly encountered these problems in the course of their investigations."

The 1977 food stamp law—taking effect this year—offers potential remedies to a number of these participation problems, says Kotz. The law eliminates the purchase requirement, which until now has kept many of the neediest people from participating. The law also simplifies application procedures to make it easier for eligible people to apply for and get stamps.

Kotz is enthusiastic about the extent to which the new law seeks to specify the rights of food stamp clients. "This Bill of Rights for food stamp users is unprecedented in welfare-style legislation," he says.

An unusual opportunity

The Food Stamp Program, Kotz concludes, "provides an unusual opportunity to take one of the programs of the 1960's which actually produced results and to build on that success.

Can public administration respond to widespread human needs? The Food Stamp Act establishes the tools for effective public policy. Will these tools be used to maximum advantage?

"This can be accomplished," says Kotz, "if local advocacy groups organize campaigns to bring nonparticipants into the programs and to insure that local officials administer programs fairly and efficiently; if state and local governments are compelled to implement effective outreach programs specifically for the elderly, children, minority groups, the 'working poor,' and others; and if the federal government provides funds and strictly enforces its rules and regulations to ensure that all Americans are well fed."

In addition, Kotz notes suggestions by Field Foundation doctors that include:

- Using poor people as outreach workers.
- Encouraging food stamp users and school food service people to buy from small farmers and from agriculture and food cooperatives run by and for the poor.
- Encouraging nonprofit organizations to serve as issuance agents for food stamps.

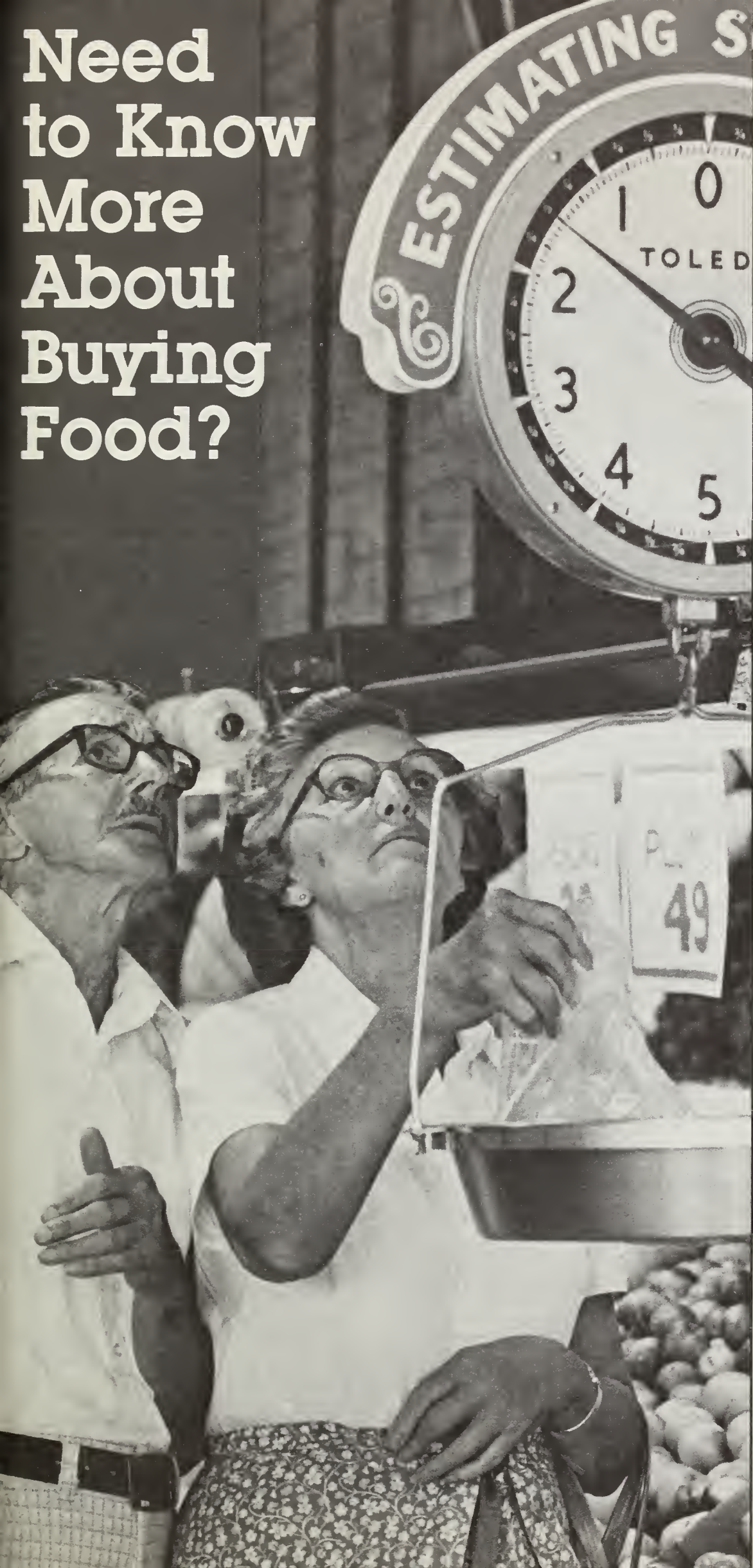
The adequacy of food and other anti-poverty programs, according to the report, depends "in considerable part both on the attitude of local communities and the extent to which poor families and minorities are included as participating citizens."

"For those who worry about charges that federal aid encourages a 'dole' mentality which discourages people from work," Kotz says, "it must be said that for millions this food aid contributes the nutrition necessary to compete for and hold a job."

"The entitlement of all needy Americans to an adequate diet," Kotz concludes, "is a goal that is within our capability. If we will only reach for it." □

by Dianne D. Jenkins

Need to Know More About Buying Food?



When it comes to buying food, just about everybody has the same problem: to get the best and most nourishing food at the lowest possible prices. It takes careful planning and wise shopping—and it's not always an easy task.

For people with low incomes, the challenge is especially great. As USDA nutrition coordinator Audrey Cross explains, these people must fight a special battle of their own. "Because people with low incomes can't spend a lot of money for food," she says, "they don't have the 'nutritional cushion' those with more money have.

"More money can buy greater amounts of foods," she explains, "and as the quantity of food available increases, so does the chance that nutritional needs are being met. The low-income person cannot afford to make mistakes."

Teaching low-income people how to help themselves is the goal of many existing programs and services across the country. Approaches run the gamut from direct one-to-one teaching to more independent ways to learn by doing.

Cooperative Extension: nationwide education

One valuable resource is the Cooperative Extension Service, one of the largest informal education networks in the world. A partnership of Federal, State and local governments, Cooperative Extension delivers practical, problem-solving instruction to people of all ages and economic levels—in urban as well as in rural areas.

State Extension programs are administered by land-grant universities in cooperation with individual counties. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Science and Education Administration has responsibility for Federal Extension.

County Extension home economists teach family-related topics, including food and nutrition. Almost every U.S. county has at least one

Extension home economist. These home economists are knowledgeable about buying nutritious foods at low cost.

Through news articles, radio and television programs, classes, and publications, they help families plan and prepare nourishing, well-balanced meals, suited to their particular needs and budgetary considerations.

The home economists work out of county CES offices. Their help is available for the asking.

"Go to your county office and take advantage of the home economists' expertise," advises Extension nutritionist Evelyn Spindler. "Also, check into the wide variety of instructional materials available there."

Many useful publications are available free (single copies only) from these offices. For family food budgeting, some particularly useful ones are: *Family Fare - A Guide To Good Nutrition*; *Your Money's Worth In Foods*; and *Food For Thrifty Families*.

Local extension offices can be found in the white pages of the phone directory under the listings for the county government or for the land-grant university. They may go by the name of "Cooperative Extension Service," or "Agricultural Extension Service."

For families with low incomes

For low-income people, the Extension Service offers special help through its Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. EFNEP hires and trains nutrition aides, who specialize in working with families—especially families with young

children—living in or near poverty.

The aides' purpose is to teach people how to achieve nutritionally adequate diets, and their approach is personal, whether they are teaching clients individually or in small groups. The aides help families understand the importance of food to health, and they offer practical lessons on menu planning, budgeting, shopping, food preparation, safety, and storage.

More than half the people served by EFNEP are food stamp users.

Aides visit families' homes

There are now more than 5,200 EFNEP aides working throughout the country. Most frequently, the aides teach homemakers individually or in small groups. Occasionally, they also go with homemakers to the super-

market and give on-the-spot lessons in food buying.

Jane Scheid is an EFNEP aide in Fairfax County, Virginia. She is trained and supervised by Denise Shaw, a home economist for the Fairfax County Extension Service. Like other EFNEP aides, Scheid resides in the community in which she teaches, so she has a special understanding of her clients' problems. The number of families she works with varies, but her caseload is low enough to allow her to make home visits every other week or so.

Patricia Tapp and her sister-in-law Wanda Shifflett are two of the people Scheid has been visiting regularly for the last few months. They are young mothers of children aged 2 months to 2 years. Both women have low incomes, and both share the challenge



EFNEP aide Jane Scheid (right) offers some food buying advice to two Virginia homemakers.

of stretching their funds to cover the expenses of a five-person household.

They say Jane Scheid has helped them find ways to cope with the problems of living on a tight budget. And they've used what they've learned from her to make some changes.

"I used to buy expensive baby food products for my children, but Mrs. Scheid showed me how to buy cheaper, healthier food for them," Wanda Shifflet says with pride.

"She's teaching me how to buy more vegetables," Patricia Tapp adds.

Jane Scheid emphasizes planning in her food purchasing lessons. "Think menu-planning," she advises. "See what you have on hand so you can utilize leftovers." A shopping list is an essential planning tool, and is even more useful when drawn up with the aid of the supermarket sale pages from the newspaper.

Checking unit pricing, buying generic and house brands, and purchasing foods which have undergone little processing and packaging are other money-saving tips Scheid passes on to her clients. "Any time they've done work for you, it costs something," she warns.

Another way to cut costs

In deciding where to shop as well as what to buy, people can save by taking the do-it-yourself approach. Thousands of New Yorkers, for example, have found they can economize—and learn—by buying directly from farmers who "set up shop" in inner-city neighborhoods.

The basic principle is direct marketing—from the farmer right to the consumer. It's not a new idea, but

Thanks to a non-profit project called Greenmarket, many New Yorkers can save by buying directly from farmers.



Photo courtesy of Greenmarket, a project of the Council on the Environment of New York City

one that's gaining popularity among city folks, suburbanites, and school food service managers.

"I'm finally discovering what real vegetables smell like."

"It's the best thing that's happened to our neighborhood—we all look forward to those wonderful, delicious, and fresh fruits and vegetables . . ."

These comments are representative of the enthusiasm of shoppers at a large farmers' market in the heart of New York. The project is a privately funded system of seven fruit and vegetable markets, and an outstanding example of a new breed of farmers' markets.

Located so that most shoppers can get there by foot or public transportation, the markets strive to appeal to a wide variety of ethnic and economic groups and to provide high-quality, low-cost fresh farm produce. Some markets accept food stamps.

Add to convenience the pleasure of buying food in the open air, in the company of congenial neighbors and farmers, and you have a delightful environment in which people can learn to buy nutritious and inexpensive food—simply by doing it!

Barry Benepe, founder and director of the project, feels that the markets play an educational role by providing an appealing and affordable route to good nutrition. "People are more likely to buy a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables if they find they taste better than what they are accustomed to," he says.

Because participating farmers are restricted to selling their own produce or produce purchased from local farmers the day before the sale, shoppers are guaranteed their wares

will be fresh. Low prices are a direct result of the absence of the middlemen who transport or process produce after it leaves the farmer and before it reaches the consumer.

Food buying tips from USDA

By learning how to become informed and thoughtful consumers, people can find their own ways to build "nutritional cushions." Here are some tips from USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service, which provides voluntary grading services to producers of meat, poultry, eggs, dairy products, and fresh, canned, frozen and dried fruits and vegetables.

Grades define levels of product quality, FSQS experts explain. For example, U.S. Grade A canned tomatoes consist of red tomatoes which are attractive and of uniform size. The less expensive U.S. Grade C tomatoes are lighter in color.

Tom Crider, FSQS expert on processed fruits and vegetables, suggests that shoppers buy the lower grades of canned or frozen vegetables for stews, soups and casseroles. "Your bonus for careful shopping will be foods that are just as wholesome and nutritious," he says, "but cheaper than higher grade products."

Hailing "generic" foods as one of the best ways to save money on processed products, Crider claims "they are an excellent bargain for your spending dollar." Generics are easily identifiable on the shelf because they carry no brand names. They are generally of Grade B or C quality. In a recent study, USDA found Grade C products run 10 to 35 percent lower in price than Grade A.

Some other ways to save

Here are some other food buying tips from FSQS:

- Eggs are extremely versatile and are an excellent source of protein at a very low cost per serving.

- Nonfat dry milk is also an excellent bargain. It can be bought in bulk and stored unrefrigerated for several months. To make the milk more palatable, you can use a combination of whole fluid milk and water in reconstituting the dry milk.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables are some of the most appealing items to be found in the supermarket. Their quality can be fairly accurately judged by appearance alone. Avoid buying fruits and vegetables in large quantities, unless you can be sure of using them before they spoil. And don't buy bruised or damaged produce—it's no bargain! It will decay more rapidly and will probably have to be thrown away.

The Food Safety and Quality Service has a number of pamphlets that explain grading, food quality, and buying tips in greater detail. A series entitled *How to Buy* offers practical guidance which can help shoppers get the most food and value for their money.

Single copies are free, and most of the pamphlets are available in Spanish. *How to Use USDA Grades in Buying Food* is also available in Spanish and includes a list of the *How to Buy* publications. Write to: Food Safety and Quality Service Information, Room 3059-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. □
by Paula Klevan



USDA grades—what do they mean? Is it best always to buy Grade A? Not necessarily.

When Disaster Strikes...

In late April, the Pearl River swept over its banks to record flood levels in Jackson, Mississippi, and parts of Alabama. The result: at least four dead and thousands homeless, much of what they owned gone.

"I hated it, you know, I was hoping it was just a bad dream. It's something you think would never happen to you but happens everywhere else."

Disasters, either natural or man-made, are usually something you hear about on radio, or see on television, or read about in the pages of your local newspaper a comfortable distance from the distressed area. But disasters and subsequent evacuations can happen anywhere. And quite unexpectedly.

The point is: it could happen to *you* at any time. Would you know what to do? Would local officials know what to do to minimize the impact of destruction?

During an evacuation, two important decisions must be made quickly. Where will people go? And once they get there, what will they eat? The Red Cross and other volunteer disaster aid groups keep supplies on hand to handle immediate food needs. But before long, food donated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture must be used to sustain the hungry.

Let's take a look at two areas where disaster struck this spring: flood-ravaged Jackson, Mississippi, and the tornado-shattered Texas towns of Vernon and Wichita Falls.

The reaction of government officials and volunteers in finding shelters and food for the homeless is our focal point, because what they do and how quickly they do it, often determines just how ill the effects of the disaster will be.

James Salter, district manager for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, retraced events as the water began to rise:

"The flooding was just beginning to get very serious," he said, "and many people were being evacuated. People were moving household goods out of their homes, and I got a call from a friend, wanting me to come over with my pickup truck to help with some movement of household goods.

"I really thought they were kidding when I first talked to them, knowing the area they lived is some distance from the Pearl River. I didn't anticipate the flooding had gotten up that high, that soon, but it had.

"The water was in the man's carport when we got to his home. We moved a lot of household goods, jacked up the remainder about 4 feet high and thought we had left them in very good shape. As it turned out the next day, my friend had 5 feet of water in his house. This happened to hundreds of people in the northeast



area of Jackson.”

It takes a while for the horror to sink in, Salter said. “Most people would be just like you and me. There’s somewhat of a shock and disbelief, and then people as a rule get busy and do what they can, but they’re still just kind of numb. The real impact, I think, hits people a day or two later. Then they realize the tremendous loss. It’s a very traumatic experience.”

Got involved right away

Salter’s office became involved almost at the start of trouble in Jackson. “My first contact was with the Red Cross,” he said. “They were on the scene, and their Red Cross Headquarters here in Jackson had quite a few people in already. They were doing some feeding from mobile units and had already set up shelters.

“We got them some USDA food from the Jackson City School Warehouse. The school lunch program had a good inventory. It worked out beautifully as far as accessibility was concerned, and we lined up the possibility of getting additional food from other States, if necessary, throughout this emergency.”

As the water continued to rise, volunteers, friends and neighbors struggled together to minimize the impact of the flooding.

“This happened all over the city,” Salter said. “I’ve never seen anything like the cooperation and the good neighbor helpfulness of people who just pitched in and did what they could for each other.”

But as the debris began to settle in Jackson and the surrounding area of the Pearl River Valley, people began to assess their losses. Bob Lindicans was one.

“The night before,” he recalled, “I worked desperately trying to move out my brother-in-law, who got about 7 feet of water in his house. I got in late that night and collapsed, you know, didn’t have dinner. I watched the mayor’s report and our street was



April 10, 1979, is a date better known as terrible Tuesday—the day twisters ripped through Vernon and Wichita Falls, Texas, two towns within the area called Tornado Alley. Over a hundred people were killed, a thousand injured, and thousands left homeless.

never mentioned. We weren't given any warning at 10 or 11 that night.

"When the baby woke up for its 6 o'clock feeding the next morning, we just happened to look outside, and the water was 3 feet from coming into our house. I called everybody I knew and asked them to come over and help us try to move out what we could. We saved what furniture we could and had to leave the rest behind. It's kind of an empty feeling."

Linda Kent, another parent with young children, said emergency feeding and food stamp distribution helped minimize the impact of the flooding. "Most definitely food and shelter are the two main basic needs right now," she said.

Thankful for help

Others in the Jackson area recalled their tragedy and were grateful for emergency food stamp distribution.

"We lost the trailer we were living in," said a man waiting in line to be certified for food stamps. "Getting food stamps is gonna come in handy. It's gonna help out."

Another man waiting in line said for his family, as for many others, loss of a home was only part of the tragedy. A ruined business would mean loss of income for some time. "The business I was employed with went under water," he explained. "It will take about a month to get back in operation."

Asked how he felt about the assistance provided during emergency, he said he felt it was an example for other countries: "I think it's just part of our system, the American system. I think it's good that we can do this sort of thing."

The Pearl River floods affected hundreds of thousands of people in parts of Mississippi and Alabama. In all, about 15,500 pounds of USDA-donated foods were used to help feed flood victims. More than 900,000 people in Mississippi and 10,000 people in Alabama were certified for emergency food stamps.

An observer in Wichita Falls was later to say, "These houses aren't destroyed, they're gone." Billy Stanford's house was gone.

"We were working in a church building—my wife and my children and I—getting stuff cleaned up for an auction sale," Stanford said. "I heard on the radio that a tornado was touching down, and I went ahead and prepared to leave, if necessary. I got my family in the car, and by that time, the tornado was moving with such speed and velocity that it almost caught us."

"We got on an expressway that runs east and west, and since the tornado was coming out of the west, naturally we went east. Just before I reached a point where I could turn south and get out of the path of it, it pulled my car's speed down by 30 miles an hour, and just shook that car real violently."

"When we returned home less than 15 minutes after we left, our home, three rental units, and the church building were completely demolished. Everything we had in the house and in the building was lost. They were all just totaled out."

"You know, we were just very thankful to the Lord that we didn't have any physical injury, and the houses and possessions can be replaced over a period of time. But we did lose some of our friends of years past, and some of our neighbors were killed. But our family escaped any injury in the storm."

Family got food help

Stanford had praise for emergency feeding operations. His family ate at shelters run by the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and church groups, using food supplied by the Department of Agriculture. They also applied for and got emergency food stamps, as did nearly 15,300 other people affected by the disaster.

"We were fed very well," Stanford

said, "and I want to commend the Department of Agriculture very highly. They're one of the departments with the least red tape. The food stamp [agency] had a number of people here. They serviced the people quickly, and I knew there were a lot of people applying. They waited on us very quickly and very courteously—and very cheerfully. The smiles really helped."

In any disaster, said Ronnie Rhodes of the Food and Nutrition Service's Southeast region, volunteers play a crucial role.

"Volunteers are vital to serving the disaster victims. Agencies such as the Red Cross and Salvation Army depend heavily on volunteers not only to prepare food and get it to the people, but also to let them know that help is available."

In Vernon and Wichita Falls, volunteers helped serve the more than 270,000 meals provided to tornado victims. Relief agencies used more than 30,344 pounds of USDA-foods for these meals.

After any disaster there is the rebuilding. The fortitude that makes new beginnings possible is exemplified by Billy Stanford.

"There's a song that means a lot to me," he said. "It's a religious song called, 'I shall rise again,' and that's the way I feel about Wichita Falls and its citizens, we're gonna rise again, we're not defeated in any measure."

For more information on disaster food assistance and how you might help, contact the nearest regional office of the Food and Nutrition Service, or write to:

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250
by Jim Henry

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